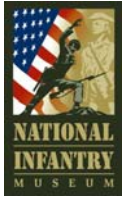


NATIONAL INFANTRY MUSEUM OPENS



CHERYL RODEWIG

“I had an odd feeling when I came through the door — like I’m going back in time; I got goose bumps,” said SFC (Retired) John Rangel, one of more than 4,000 who visited the National Infantry Museum during its grand opening June 19.

“It was due, to have something like this,” said the 72-year-old Vietnam veteran. “It’s a tribute to the Infantry Soldier. Being an Infantry sergeant like I was, it was my duty to protect my men during this war in Vietnam, and I lost a lot of them.”

Many veterans, from World War I to Iraq and Afghanistan, never came home, Rangel said. They never had the chance to marry or have children.

“They gave their lives for this,” he said. “To me, that is meaningful. It is history today for this community and for Fort Benning and for all Infantry Soldiers.”

The museum honors Infantrymen of all generations, from the

At left and below, the National Infantry Museum covers more than 190,000 square feet and has six galleries. It also includes a restaurant, an IMAX theater and a World War II Street.

Photos courtesy of National Infantry Foundation





earliest battles of the United States to the current war in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"You have to give everybody a good view of what the Soldier went through as an Infantry Soldier," he said. "I think a lot of people take for granted that you're alive today, you can do what you want to do. That is because the Soldiers are here to protect this country."

Soldiers of today and yesterday toured the galleries, many sharing memories and experiences. CPL Dave Broening, 2nd Battalion, 69th Armor Regiment, said he enjoyed talking with the older veterans, particularly one who pointed out a weapon he carried in Bastogne, France, during World War II.

"We're Infantry Soldiers, and we're paying respects to the ones who came before us," Broening said. "That's the reason why we're Infantry, because these are the people who led the way for us to do it, to carry on. Anybody who walks through here and actually reads some of the stuff or talks to some of these guys who did what's going on in these pictures, they'd have a better understanding, a better appreciation of the life they have now."

The museum features six era galleries, a family gallery honoring those who love and support Infantrymen, a marksmanship simulator and halls of honor for Rangers and officer candidates. Next to the museum and part of the 200-acre Patriot Park is the World War II Street, which includes a chapel, barracks, the headquarters of GEN George S. Patton, and other original 1940s buildings.

The museum will draw around 400,000 visitors annually to the tricommunity, according to an economic impact study conducted by the Columbus State University School of Business.

"It's a tribute to all who have served as Infantrymen," said keynote speaker GEN (Retired) Colin Powell, former Secretary of State and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. "It's a wonderful facility because you get some sense of what battle is all about."

Visitors can get a sense of battle in the realistic walk-through of America's conflicts during the Infantry's 234-year history. In the Vietnam portion of the Cold War gallery, the floor rumbles at the sound



The Hall of Valor is a glass-enclosed space dedicated to recognizing deeds of exceptional bravery. Plaques honoring each of the nearly 1,500 Infantry recipients of the Medal of Honor line the walls, and a computer kiosk allows visitors to read the full citations for each recipient.

of explosions and the temperature and humidity mimic the jungles of Vietnam. Visitors can look through a periscope at "no man's land" from a boardwalk trench in the World War I exhibit. In World War II Street, located outside the museum, the scent of cherry pie wafts through the mess hall. For the museum's signature exhibit, the Last 100 Yards, lifelike figures modeled after Fort Benning Soldiers depict infantrymen from the Revolutionary War to Operation Iraqi Freedom.

"This place makes a hero of the Infantry itself — the legions of anonymous patriots whom history does not record but whose service and sacrifice (were) crucial to the success of our country," Powell said. "Indeed, no war in all of history in any land has been won without an infantry ... Planes fly away, ships sail away, our brothers in the army are nearby, but to take and hold land and to dare anyone to try to take it away from us is our core mission. Our weapon is the rifle. We go the last 100 yards."

As an Infantryman himself, Powell said he learned his most important lessons, including trust and leadership, at "the Benning school for boys."

"This was our first Army home," he said. "Benning molded me ... and made me a professional Infantryman as it has done for hundreds of thousands of others over

the years. People often asked me after I became Chairman or Secretary of State, 'Where did you learn about leadership? Was it in graduate school? Was it at the war college?' and the answer is always the same: 'No, it was at Fort Benning.'"

The museum that now stands just outside the gates of the Home of the Infantry is "much more than a mere memorial," Powell said, for its depiction of the Soldier's story from the point of view of the Soldier.

"Insofar as the National Infantry Museum serves as a reminder and a salute to the millions of men and women who have worn the military uniform on behalf of this country, it is a welcome and much needed addition to America's commemorative institutions," he said. "You're not just reading about these places and these wars. ... You are seeing history living itself out, history in action. But more importantly, a place like this puts the individual Soldier into the history book. It's all about the Soldier, the one man with the rifle."

For more information about the National Infantry Museum and Soldier Center at Patriot Park, the IMAX Theater, the Fife and Drum Restaurant, or the World War II Street, visit www.nationalinfantrymuseum.com.

(Cheryl Rodewig writes for Fort Benning's post newspaper The Bayonet. This article first appeared in the 26 June issue of The Bayonet.)